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SUBJECT: AFRICOM DEPUTY COMMANDER YATES' MARCH 12 MEETINGS
WITH NGOS, PARLIAMENTARIANS, EXPERTS AND AFRICAN DEFENSE
ATTACHES

Classified By: Charge Wayne Bush for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: AFRICOM Deputy to the Commander for Civ/Mil Activities (DCMA) Mary Carlin Yates received a wide variety of opinions and input March 12 during meetings with representatives of the NGO community in Brussels, a lunch with Belgian parliamentarians, and a dinner with several Africa experts. Yates shared AFRICOM's mission of a sustained and holistic approach to engagement in Africa. The NGOs shared concerns about the U.S. military conducting humanitarian assistance. Ambassador Yates clarified USAID's role as the U.S. assistance agency, and AFRICOM's work in concert with USAID where necessary. The NGO's also raised the problem of sexual violence committed by rebels and soldiers in Africa, and asked AFRICOM to consider cooperating with NGOs that train soldiers about sexual violence. Parliamentarians also discussed sexual violence, underscoring Belgium's leadership on this issue in Europe. The MPs mentioned Belgium's strong expertise and well-developed sources of information in central Africa. They were positive on recent DRC - Rwanda cooperation against the FDLR, but less so about Belgian experience training soldiers. Charge Bush asked about mineral exploitation and armed groups, and one MP answered that regional cooperation could help, but the free flow of trade in the Great Lakes region should continue. Mineral exploitation was also broached at a dinner with Africa experts, including an allegation that Iran was exporting uranium from the Congo. One researcher mentioned Belgium's efforts to develop tracing technology, such as that used with diamonds under the Kimberley process, while another remarked that policy makers need to consider the five million people who rely on mining for work in any mineral control regime. MFA contacts at the dinner shared Belgium's concerns about governance and social issues in the Congo. One said Belgium had met limited success in trying to train the army or hold the DRC government accountable. Another said the challenges of peace and stability and weak governance were serious, but Belgium had a responsibility to be involved in central Africa and in other areas of the continent. In a meeting with African Defense Attaches stationed in Brussels, Yates explained AFRICOM's mission and fielded questions which mainly focused on the role AFRICOM can play in development. End Summary.

NGO Concerns

¶12. (U) AFRICOM DCMA Yates met with representatives from four NGOs: Shannon Meehan of the International Crisis Group, Kris Berwouts of the European Network for Central Africa, Thomas Van Acker of 11.11.11, and Hilde Deman of Pax Christi Vlaanderen. Meehan explained that thirteen large agencies' international and local staff were expelled from Sudan that morning, leaving no one to administer assistance. Yates said AFRICOM was following events in Sudan closely.

¶13. (C) Meehan expressed the NGO community's concern about the militarization of U.S Africa policy. She described the NGO imperative of neutrality in administering humanitarian aid. Military action, she said, was not neutral by its very nature. Meehan argued that military personnel should not use the word humanitarian, but rather assistance or help. Many populations see the military as security providers in positive situations or looters in negative cases. Ambassador Yates said she would take the message back to headquarters. She clarified that AFRICOM worked in concert with civilians, and that USAID was the lead U.S humanitarian aid agency, not the military. Meehan recommended a UK study that examined the delivery of aid in Iraq and Afghanistan provincial reconstruction teams and analyzed the aid - military connection.

¶14. (C) The NGOs were concerned with sexual violence against women by soldiers and rebels in Africa. Deman noted that Belgium had been a leader on this issue in Europe and its

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importance as a political issue for the GOB and Belgian public. Meehan said she had trained a unit of U.S. Marines on sexual violence issues and urged deputy Commander Yates to recommend extra training for AFRICOM and its operations.

Parliamentary Lunch

¶15. (U) Ambassador Yates received a warm reception from members of Parliament at a lunch hosted by Charge Bush. The guests were Francophone Liberal (MR) Representative Xavier Baeselen, Francophone Socialist Representative Andre Flahaut, MR Senator Francois Roelants du Vivier, MR Representative Xavier De Donne, and Flemish Socialist Sp.A Senator Marleen Temmerman.

¶16. (C) De Donne said Belgium probably had the best information and knowledge on Congo and Burundi, and the U.S. the best in Rwanda. He opined that without U.S. encouragement, cooperation between Rwanda and the DRC, including the joint Rwanda-DRC operation against the FDLR, would not have taken place. He observed that the ground situation had improved during his visit to Kivu in February. As the head of an NGO that supported Virunga National Park, he had a network of 700 rangers covering the broader border region. Representative Andre Flahaut, Belgium's former Defense Minister, said it was important to promote cooperation between Europeans, the United States and Africans. He said AFRICOM presence on the ground was beneficial to collect accurate information not always available to capitals. He praised NSC General Jones as someone who was familiar with Africa, as well as with Belgium from his time at SHAPE.

¶17. (C) Roelants du Vivier asked about the U.S. military's State Partners Program, which involves U.S National Guard teams in training soldiers in foreign countries. He said Belgium had experience in training African troops and wondered if Guard programs would be useful in Africa. Ambassador Yates said that the State Partnership Program was very successful. She added that the U.S. Department of State has trained 45,000 soldiers from twenty-two countries via the ACOTA program. She said the training helped generate

peacekeepers, but said Africa was a greater consumer of peacekeepers than it trained. Yates said the challenge in Africa was deciding who to train. Rwanda was a model country utilizing "train the trainer" programs. De Donnea mentioned Belgium's experience training Congolese soldiers. The GOB invested time and money on soldiers who went unpaid and unsupported afterward, and often pillaged. De Donnea witnessed soldiers begging on his trip to Kivu; they lacked tents and transport. He contrasted the DRC soldiers with Nkunda's troops who did not take from civilians.

¶ 8. (C) Charge Bush asked about mineral exploitation and suggestions for reducing the flow of financial resources to armed groups. De Donnea said all armed groups exploited minerals, and offered regional cooperation as an overall solution. He said that trade routes naturally led east, and border control, tracing, and the control of minerals had to include the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda. He said the free flow of commerce must continue, and cooperation between regional authorities should facilitate rather than hinder this flow.

¶ 9. (U) Representative Baeselen suggested AFRICOM meet with the Foreign Affairs Committee in Parliament to inform a wider array of Belgian lawmakers about its work; few in Belgium knew of U.S. engagement in Africa. Baeselen then raised the issue of sexual violence in the Congo, and said Europe should do more against it, requesting that someone from AFRICOM speak on this subject with other parliamentarians. Yates replied that AFRICOM would be willing to speak to Parliament.

She said the plight of civilians in the eastern DRC was AFRICOM's number one concern and mentioned that President Obama's first legislation in the Senate focused on these

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issues. De Donnea said rape remains a serious concern. Senator Temmerman, a gynecologist who has worked extensively in the Congo, entered politics specifically to raise the profile of women's health issues. She has developed networks throughout Africa on sexual and reproductive health. She promoted the concept of health care access as a human right, and underscored the importance of family planning and contraceptives in African countries. Temmerman said many ministers of health in Africa are concerned with demographic issues and believe improving reproductive health is key. Ambassador Yates said AFRICOM was building its health outreach capacity. Temmerman said this needs to be the top priority in health assistance, and that NGOs should be involved. Baeselen expressed the Foreign Affairs Committee's willingness to host a meeting that included NGOs to highlight work on health issues and U.S. efforts in Africa.

Dinner with Africa Experts

¶ 10. (U) Charge Bush invited a diverse group of Belgium's Congo experts to a dinner for Ambassador Yates that included Royal Africa Museum Director Guido Gryseels, Egmont Institute for International Relations Senior Fellow Hans Hoebeke, University of Antwerp Professor Filip Reyntjens, MFA Africa Director Guy Trouveroy, MFA Deputy Chief of Staff Jean-Luc Bodson, MFA Political Director for Multilateral Affairs Jean-Arthur Regibeau, Antwerp World Diamond Center International Affairs Director Mark Van Bockstael, and Acting Chief of Strategy for the Belgian Armed Forces, LTG Rik Jennart.

¶ 11. (C) Regibeau said Belgium was pleased that Washington was showing renewed interest in Africa. Belgium's relations with the DRC were improving, but he cautioned that Belgium's efforts with the army or in the broader social context had met with little success. Regibeau said the DRC constantly asked for more aid with no strings attached, while Belgium faced limited resources coupled with a desire for measurable results. Trouveroy said Belgium could best add value as a partner in the DRC and the wider central Africa region. He suggested two basic challenges to progress in the region:

peace and security and poor governance. Trouveroy said armies in Africa existed not so much to defend borders, but to protect leaders or get rid of them. Challenges notwithstanding, he argued that the West and Belgium had a special responsibility. Belgium could do more, even outside central Africa, whether in Sudan, Somalia, the Sahel, or the Gulf of Guinea. Reyntjens noted a variance in the level of governance in the region. He described the DRC as a failed regime and Rwanda as a strong, but criminal regime. He was mildly more enthusiastic about Burundi's success with solving ethnic problems, even with its problematic government.

¶12. (C) Charge Bush's question on mineral exploitation led to Gryseels' mention of visitors to the Royal Museum and its research facilities. The Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs visited when in Brussels, and the DRC Minister of Mines would visit March 13. MFA supported research is being conducted to trace minerals from their source with geological signatures. The GOB is also trying to develop a geological service in Ktanga. Hoebeke cautioned on the social impact of developing a completely controlled mineral export regime in a region where five million persons make their living by artisanal mining.

¶13. (S/NF) Gryseels also mentioned his awareness of Iranian efforts to transport uranium from the Congo to Iran.

Meeting with African Defense Attaches

¶14. (C) Yates met with a number of Defense Attaches from African countries who are based in Brussels, including those from Benin, Gabon, South Africa, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria and

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Morocco. The Attaches were not initially familiar with AFRICOM and its mission, and Yates provided them with a power-point presentation on the Command's objectives. The Attaches were primarily interested in how AFRICOM could assist in meeting Africa's development needs.

Press Events

¶15. (U) Ambassador Yates seized a number of opportunities to explain AFRICOM to the press during her visit. She gave interviews to Flemish radio, Radio France International and two newspapers, and also taped an interview with the Embassy's USG press hub for use as needed.

¶16. (C) Comment: Ambassador Yates' meetings with NGOs, parliamentarians, and Africa hands provided her with a broad range of views and an awareness of the wealth of experience and insight on Africa that exists in Belgium. She was also able to explain AFRICOM's mission and its holistic approach to its military mission in support of U.S. foreign policy. On the whole, her visit advanced this mission's effort to engage Belgium on Africa and impress upon the Belgians the U.S. resolve and capacity to be a reliable partner.

BUSH

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